

Knowledge

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In the Name of Allâh, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

by Imaam Ibn Hazm al-Andalusî

31. If knowledge had no other merit than to make the ignorant fear and respect you, and scholars love and honour you, this would be good enough reason to seek after it. Let alone all its other merits in this world and the next.
32. If ignorance had no other fault than to make the ignorant man jealous of knowledgeable men and jubilant at seeing more people like himself, this by itself would be reason enough to oblige us to feel it. Let alone the other bad results of this evil in this world and the next!
33. If knowledge and the action of devoting oneself to it had no purpose except to free the man who seeks it from the exhausting anxieties and many worries which afflict the mind, that alone would certainly be enough to drive us to seek knowledge. But what should we say of the other benefits too numerous to list, the least of which are the above-mentioned, and all of which accrue to the knowledgeable man. In search of benefits as small as these the petty kings have worn themselves out in seeking distraction from their anxieties in games of chess, dicing, wine, song, hunting expeditions and other pastimes which bring nothing but harm in this world and the next and absolutely no benefit.
34. If the scholar who has spent long peaceful hours (at his studies) stopped to think how his knowledge has protected him against humiliation at the hands of the ignorant, and against anxiety about unknown truths, and what joy it has brought him by enabling him to solve problems which others find insoluble, he would certainly increase his expressions of gratitude to Allah and rejoice more in the knowledge that he has and desire even more to add to it.
35. Anyone who spends his time studying something inferior, abandoning higher studies of which he is capable, is like someone who sows corn in a field capable of growing wheat, or who plants bushes in a soil which could corrupt palm trees and olives.
36. To spread knowledge among those incapable of understanding it would be as harmful as giving honey and sugary confections to someone with a fever, or giving musk and amber to someone with a migraine caused by an excess of bile.
37. A man who is miser with his knowledge is worse than a man who is a miser with his money, for the money-miser is being mean with something which does not get used up and is not lost when it is given away.
38. Anyone who has a natural inclination towards a branch of knowledge, even if it is inferior to other branches, should not abandon it, or he would be like someone who plants coconuts in al-Andalus or olive trees in India where neither would produce fruit.
39. The noblest branches of knowledge are those that bring you close to the Creator and help you to be pleasing to Him.
40. When you compare yourself with others in matters of wealth, position, and health, you should look at people less favored than yourself. When you compare yourself with others in matters of religion, knowledge and virtue, look at people who are better than yourself.
42. If a madman threw himself as deeply into good sense as he throws himself into madness, he would surely be wiser than Al Hasan Al Basri, Plato of Athens and Vuzurgmehr the Persian.
43. Intelligence has its limits; it is useless unless it is based on the guidance of religion or on good fortune in this world.
44. Do not harm your soul by experimenting with corrupt views in order to demonstrate their corruption to someone who has consulted you, otherwise you will lose your soul. If you shield yourself from acting in a detestable way, any criticism that can be thrown at you by a man of corrupt beliefs because you disagree with him is better than his respect and better than the bad effect on both of you if you committed these detestable acts.
45. Guard against taking pleasure in any way that will harm your soul and is not required of you by the

religious law nor by virtue.

46. Knowledge no longer exists if one has ignored the attributes of the Almighty Great Creator.

47. There is no worse calamity for knowledge and for scholars than when outsiders intrude. They are ignorant and think that they are knowledgeable; they ruin everything and believe that they are helping.

48. Anyone who is seeking happiness in the Hereafter, wisdom in this world, the best way to behave, the sum of all moral qualities, the practice of all the virtues, should take as his model Muhammad, the Prophet of God – God grant him blessings and peace – and emulate as far as possible the Prophet's morals and behaviour. May God help us to take him as an example, by His grace, ameen!

49. The ignorant have annoyed me on two occasions in my lifetime. First, when they spoke of things they did not know, at a time when I was equally ignorant; the second time when they kept silent in my presence [in the days when I had learnt something]. In the same way they were always silent about matters which would have benefited them to speak about, and spoke about matters which brought them no benefit.

50. Scholars have brought me pleasure on two occasions in my lifetime: first, they taught me when I was ignorant; the second of them was when they conversed with me after I had been taught.

51. One of the merits of religious knowledge and asceticism in this world is that Almighty God does not put it within reach of anyone except those who are worthy of it and deserve it. One of the disadvantages of the great things of this world, wealth and fame, is that they mostly fall to the lot of people who are unworthy of them and do not deserve them.

52. Anyone who is seeking after virtue should keep company with the virtuous and should take no companion with him on his way except the noblest friend, one of those people who is sympathetic, charitable, truthful, sociable, patient, trustworthy, loyal, magnanimous, pure in conscience and a true friend.

53. Anyone who is seeking fame, fortune and pleasure will keep company only with people who resemble mad dogs and sly foxes: they will take for their travelling companions only people [inimical to his belief] who are cunning and depraved in nature.

54. The usefulness of the knowledge [of good] in the practice of virtue is considerable: anyone who knows the beauty of virtue will practice it, though it may be rarely. Knowing the ugliness of vice, he will avoid it, though it may be rarely. The man with knowledge of the good will listen to soundly based praise and desire it for himself. He will listen to talk of evil and desire to avoid it. From this premise it necessarily follows that knowledge has a part in every virtue, and ignorance has a part in every vice. A man who has had no instruction in the knowledge [of good] will not practice virtue unless he has an extremely pure nature, a virtuous constitution. It is the particular state of the Prophets (peace and the blessings of God be upon them!) for God has taught them virtue in its entirety, without them having learnt it from men.

55. It is true that I have seen among the common people some who, by their excellent behaviour and morals, were not surpassed by any wise man, any scholarly, self-controlled man. But this is very rare. And I have seen man who have studied the different branches of knowledge, who have a good knowledge of the messages of the Prophets – peace be upon them – and the advice of the philosophers and who nevertheless surpass the most wicked in their bad behaviour, their depravity, both internal and external. * These are the worst of creatures. * This is very common and I therefore perceive that these two [moral attitudes] are a favour which is granted or withheld by Allah the Almighty.

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